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ABSTRACT

The Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan started the Women's Secondary Education Project through distance learning in 1986. It was designed to meet the educational needs of rural women who are denied access to the formal education system because of social and economic constraints. The distance education method suited these women because by studying at home they were able to combine their education with domestic duties. The course consists of self-study course books, supplemented with audiocassette materials, a study guide, and radio and television courses. Once a week, students go to a local study center for tutoring. Many of the courses are of a functional nature and include various vocational skills. The certificate awarded is equivalent to those awarded by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education in Pakistan. The program has been very popular; 3,000 students have completed the program, and approximately 6,000 are foreseen for upcoming enrollment. This group of women will have tremendous impact on the development of society as a whole. Graduates have become teachers, health workers, social workers, and skilled women able to contribute financially to their families. They have gained confidence, self-esteem, and financial independence. Parents, husbands, brothers, in-laws, local communities, and religious leaders have all recognized the quality of the program. The program was expanded first to include urban women and most recently to include males. An appendix lists courses offered. Six data tables outline distance-education advantages and program outcomes. (Contains 10 references.) (TD)

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A CASE STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, PAKISTAN

Riffat Haque and Syeda Najeeba Batool

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Foreword

The Women's Secondary Education Programme (WSEP) was started in 1986 at the Allama Iqbal Open University as a project called the Secondary School Certificate (SSC), with the funding of the Government of the Netherlands and the Women's Division of the Government of Pakistan. The intention was to cater for the needs of women's education. It provided secondary education through distance education to rural women, including those living in remote areas and low-income families. The distance education method suited these women because, by studying at home, they were able to combine their education with domestic duties. This innovative approach proved to be a viable option for women to study and obtain their Matriculation Certificate but also, by enhancing women's income-generating skills, it also had an impact. Many of the courses are of a functional nature, and include various vocational skills. The certificate awarded is on a par with those awarded by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education in Pakistan.

After testing in the pilot areas, the WSEP was extended to the whole of Pakistan and was made available to both rural and urban women. The personal contacts used to establish the student profile data bank have shown that this education has opened up new vistas for female students who were not able to have access to mainstream education. It has had a considerable impact on their lives: it has helped enhance their knowledge, create a positive image and self-confidence, earn respect from the community and, above all, contribute to their empowerment.

From the spring of 1999, the WESP has also been open to male students with revised course clusters. The enrolment of 13,000 speaks for itself. In addition to ensuring the accessibility of this level of education, the WESP can play an important role in contributing to the overall improvement of basic education in Pakistan.

It is an honour for the Institute of Mass Education (IME) to share this case study with educators and field practitioners world-wide. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the IME team, which has worked hard to make possible the publication of this monograph.

Dr Mussaret Anwar Sheika
Director, Institute of Mass Education
July 1999

Introduction

The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) of Pakistan started the Women's Secondary Education Project (WSEP) through distance learning in 1986. The intention was to make secondary education available to women who did not have access to formal high schools after completing middle-level education (up to Grade 8). The project is unique and has many distinctive features. It was designed to cater for the educational needs of rural women who are denied access to the formal education system because of social and economic constraints. Accordingly, the course materials were designed and developed for the special needs of those women. Most of the courses are skill-oriented and are geared to the real-life situation of rural women. The project offers flexibility in methodology and implementation and has provided support to the target group at all levels.

The Governments of Pakistan and the Netherlands jointly funded the project. It was implemented in two phases: Phase I from 1986 to 1989; and Phase II from 1993 to 1995. There was a bridging period of three years between the two phases. The project formally ended in 1996 and has now been institutionalized as a regular programme called the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Programme.

In 1999 the AIOU opened the programme to male learners by adding new courses and removing gender bias from previous course contents. The addition of technical and science courses will be another incentive for learners.

Background

CONTEXT

Education in Pakistan is confronted with a tremendous challenge—meeting the needs of its fast-growing population, as well as creating a dynamic society of literate, well-educated and skilled citizens. The overall growth rate in education is low, especially for women. Only about 32% of women in Pakistan can read and write. The literacy rate among women in rural areas is even lower—20.08%—although 88 million people live in rural areas (Government of Pakistan, 1998). The female participation rate at primary-school level is 55%, with the drop-out rate alarmingly high, particularly in two provinces-Baluchistan (80%) and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) (60%). Among the seven countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), Pakistan is in sixth position as regards adult literacy, ahead of Nepal. Among the E-9,[1] countries it comes last.

At the level of secondary education, the rural/urban and male/female inequalities are greater. 'In the rural areas of interior Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan less than 1% and in Punjab 3% of the girls of the relevant age group are enrolled in secondary schools' (Haque & Helleman, 1992). The number of girls' high schools is very low in rural areas compared with the number of boys' high schools. About two-thirds of the villages in Pakistan do not even have separate schools for girls. The possibilities for expanding the education system, making primary and secondary education accessible to women through the establishment of local girls' schools, are restricted because of a chronic shortage of female teachers in the rural areas and a lack of suitable facilities for women in schools.

Women's low educational status affects all aspects of their lives. It limits their access to income-generating opportunities, information and technology relevant to their lives, and health opportunities.

The state of education in the early 1980s, when the WSEP was first conceived, was worse than the current situation described above. In 1981, the overall literacy rate was 26.2% and the female literacy rate about 16%. In the

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[1] E-9 is the term designating the world's nine most populous countries which came together at a summit held in New Delhi, India in 1993 to discuss the realization of the goals of 'Education for All' formulated at the international conference in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. The nine countries are Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan.

urban areas, comprising 30% of Pakistan's total population, almost half of the population over 9 years of age was illiterate. In the rural areas, however, only one out of six persons over the age of 9 could be considered literate. Generally, women's literacy rate was far below that of men: in rural areas it was 7.3%, compared with 26.2% for men (Government of Pakistan, 1998, p. 104). Girls' lower rate of enrolment in primary education (Grades 1-5) was related to the availability of girls' schools and local teachers. Slightly more than one-third of all 44,000 Pakistani villages had girls' schools, while 70% had boys' schools. This meant that the majority of girls in rural areas were deprived of the opportunity to enter the formal system of education. More than half of the girls dropped out of school before completing primary education. (Hakemulder & Helleman-Toxopeus, 1989).

The current problem is more severe at the secondary level because the government has been devoting more attention to the eradication of illiteracy and to the provision of basic education. Furthermore, on reaching the age of puberty, girls are more restricted in mobility because of cultural attitudes and household responsibilities. Secondary education is considered a milestone in the Pakistani education system. It not only provides the middle-level work force but also opens up opportunities for higher education.

Secondary education of women is especially very important for the development of the country. Studies have shown that women with secondary education marry later, have considerably fewer children and are more likely to educate their children. Secondary education gives women access to a number of qualified jobs, especially that of teacher. For rural women, becoming a teacher is one of the very few options to earn a living in a socially respected way (Batool & Bakkar, 1997).

The AIOU has a special mandate from the Government of Pakistan to provide educational opportunities to people who are excluded from participation in the regular system of education. It has been assigned a special role in the development of educational programmes for women through distance learning and the media. Thus, it has the potential to reach women who are excluded from further participation in the formal education system. It has developed a variety of alternative and innovative learning methods relevant to the needs of Pakistani women.

ISSUES

The issues addressed by the WSEP are described below, together with the solutions provided.

- The major factor contributing to the low enrolment of women in secondary

education is the unavailability of high schools near their homes. The programme ensures women's access to secondary education by providing distance learning, which enables them to study at home.

- Girls and women in rural areas are often unable to attend formal schools at secondary level because of the inflexibility of the formal system. Many females who have gaps in their education are prevented from attending formal schools because of an age limit; and many are unable to follow regular school schedules because of domestic duties. The formal system requires students to take between eight and ten subjects at a time, which is quite a burden for girls and women from rural areas with responsibilities at home and in the fields. The WSEP, on the other hand, has no upper age limit for entry. Any female who is 14 or over and has a middle-level education certificate may be admitted. The programme was planned as a distance education venture, which takes up less of women's time since they do not have to go to school every day. They can stay at home, do their household chores and still study. They are required to go to study centres near their homes only once a week for a few hours. They take a maximum of two credits' worth of courses at a time, which means two or three subjects per semester. The duration of each semester is six months. The programme therefore lessens the burden of study. The course materials are designed for self-study, thus reducing women's dependence on tutoring.
- Another important issue was the introduction of an alternative curriculum which is needs-based, skill-oriented and relevant to the lives of rural Pakistani women. The courses offered through the WSEP were thus designed to help women improve their income-generating capabilities.
- There is an acute shortage of local qualified female teachers in rural areas. To become a teacher in a primary school, a girl is required to have a Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and a Primary Teacher-Training Certificate. The programme was aimed at providing qualified local girls as potential teachers.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the programme are:

- To increase and diversify educational opportunities for girls and women who have little access to the formal education system because of socio-economic constraints;
- To offer an alternative curriculum through distance learning courses, and provide an educational qualification which is equivalent to SSC education in the formal system;

- To offer women, for their economic independence, functional and skill-oriented courses related to their needs;
- To produce a viable and well-balanced curriculum that offers sufficient and relevant courses predominantly for rural women;
- To enable those who have completed the programme to obtain the SSC;
- To make distance learning at SSC level for rural women a planned and sustainable programme.

The AIOU was the first university in Asia to introduce this type of programme (in 1986). Experience with secondary education through distance learning is limited. A number of African countries have provided secondary education through distance learning to school children and to adults, both male and female (Curran & Murphy, 1992). In the South Asian region two countries that may be mentioned in this connection are India and Bangladesh. The National Open School of India runs a secondary education programme through non-formal schooling. Bangladesh launched a secondary education project, based on distance learning, for girls and women in 1995 (Batool & Bakkar, 1997).

Target audience

The programme caters mostly for rural girls and women, but urban girls and women are also served. The prerequisite for entry into the programme is a middle-level education certificate and the minimum age for enrolment is 14. The average age of students-rural or urban-is 21. Since there is no upper age limit, older women can enrol if they so wish.

There are both married and unmarried students, but most are unmarried and live with their parents. Married students live with their in-laws. A few students live on their own. Those who live with their parents are influenced by their fathers, brothers and mothers in their day-to-day decisions and obtain permission from their elders to enrol in the programme. In the case of married students, husbands and in-laws are influential. Therefore, whenever the programme is publicized, family members are also contacted. Experience shows that parents, brothers and husbands are supportive of the female students who want to continue their education in their spare time, because after obtaining the SSC women can earn money and provide financial support to the household. Trends in women's education are changing, basically because of economic needs.

Financially, the students are dependent on their elders and husbands. In certain cases, those who already have jobs can afford to pay their own fees, but otherwise their parents, brothers and husbands must pay them. Students also need to be accompanied in order to travel, and they need their elders to pay their fares. Socially, it is still not acceptable for women to travel alone; but it is respectable and safe to travel in the company of an elder or with a male family member.

Living conditions vary from student to student. In rural areas, a student may belong to a very rich family, but generally students belong to lower-income groups and often live a hand-to-mouth existence. In urban areas, students may also come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Middle- and lower-class families are more eager to educate their daughters because that will afford them some economic independence as a family and as individuals. For wealthier families, education of this type is not necessary.

Better education may ensure a better marriage proposal for a girl in Pakistani society, as it may be felt that an educated partner can be more supportive. In certain cases, it has been found that girls want to obtain their SSC before getting married.

Many students live in large families with six to fifteen members. In accordance with custom, boys are given preference in every aspect of life. The larger the family, the less the chance of education for a girl, although in some

cases, all siblings will be educated even if there are financial constraints. However, the involvement of daughters in day-to-day household chores is always considered a primary necessity. They look after their younger brothers and sisters, help their parents in the field, cook, fetch water and firewood, and clean the house. Therefore, providing a daughter with time for education is not considered a priority.

The myth survives that purdah (the veil) restricts females from continuing their education, and they therefore drop out at the age of 13 or 14. Religion is also considered a barrier to their education, although Islam does not impose any restriction on women acquiring knowledge.

Students may live in remote areas where transportation is not available. In certain cases, they may be physically handicapped. In other cases, the distance to the schools may not be great, but the terrain is difficult and mountainous, with natural catastrophes and other factors posing a danger to travellers.

Generally, outspoken females are not appreciated in Pakistani society, and it is not customary for women's ideas to be heard. The majority of students are shy and need a great deal of encouragement to express themselves. Furthermore, because Pakistani women have domestic responsibilities and little time for study, they require much guidance, advice and motivation throughout the semesters. Moreover, they must be provided with information that uplifts and improves their socio-economic situation.

Planning, design and financing

The success and sustainability of the SSC programme after thirteen years are due to extensive planning throughout that period. In line with the President of Pakistan's directive in 1984, a project proposal was made and forwarded to the Women's Division of the Government of Pakistan (now the Ministry of Women and Development, Youth Affairs and Social Welfare). It was also submitted to the Government of the Netherlands for funding.

In 1984, the Government of the Netherlands sent an appraisal mission to Pakistan to consider the proposal. In view of the AIOU's experience in distance education, its strong infrastructure at its central office in Islamabad and its regional network comprising thirty-four offices throughout Pakistan, the mission recommended the proposal for funding.

In February 1985, a detailed project proposal was submitted to the Government of Pakistan and was discussed and approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP). The consensus reached by these authorities was that the Government of the Netherlands should bear all expenses relating to the setting-up and running of the project, the social and physical infrastructure at the AIOU's central office and in field areas, development, printing, production, presentation of an agreed number of courses with multimedia support, monitoring and evaluation. It was agreed that the Government of Pakistan and the AIOU would bear the expenses for some courses and should facilitate the project through already established administrative and academic departments.

By September 1985, the implementation plan had been prepared on the basis of the approved project document, i.e. the Planning Commission-I (PC-I) document. The approved grant was Rs.11,667 million, of which Rs.8,742 million was from the Government of the Netherlands and Rs.2,925 million from the Government of Pakistan to the AIOU for implementation of the project between 1985 and 1988. However, the Government of Pakistan's allocation was never requested by the AIOU and therefore never released.

Owing to a delay in the release of funds, the implementation period for the first phase was rescheduled for 1986 to 1989. Phase I was divided into four sub-phases:

- Preparatory phase, January 1986-September 1986;
- Sub-phase I, October 1986-December 1987;
- Sub-phase II, January 1988-September 1988;
- Sub-phase III, January 1989-December 1989.

When Phase I ended, the success of the project was obvious, but it was too early to assess its institutionalization. During the first phase the project was

fully accredited by the Inter-Board Committee of Chairmen. This recognition of the AIOU's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) through distance education put it on a par with certificates awarded by the twenty-two Boards of Secondary Education in Pakistan's formal education system. This made it possible for those who had obtained the AIOU's SSC to join any stream of education or employment.

The overall positive external and internal evaluations recommended the extension of the project for further development and improvement in order to enhance its sustainability for eventual institutionalization as a regular AIOU programme.

At the end of Phase I, however, the external evaluation assessed the project as an overly ambitious endeavour, because the rapid growth in all areas (materials development, course launching, area expansion, increased enrolment, etc.) prevented it from adapting adequately to the AIOU infrastructure. Thanks to the motivation and dedication of the project team, all targets were met, but the project could not find its place as a part of the system within the AIOU's structure. Another setback at this stage was the change of Vice-Chancellor, as a result of which the project activities suffered. These setbacks resulted in delays in starting semesters, mailing, admission, examination and all other field activities. Consequently, publicity, motivation, supervision and counselling were curtailed for two years; but although the project team suffered, it did not lose heart. The funding agency appreciated this and agreed to begin Phase II. By the start of that phase, the AIOU was clearer about the status of the project, and was ready to institutionalize it as a regular programme.

Phase II was started with the objective of focusing on the following areas:

- better co-ordination of the student intake, so that the AIOU's management could cope adequately;
- improvement of the quality of courses and instructional materials;
- strengthening and improvement of the service delivery mechanism with the assistance of field co-ordinators.

With these specific objectives another PC-I, along the same lines as those used for the planning process for Phase I, was prepared. The budget allocation for Phase II from the Government of the Netherlands was Rs 14,164 million and Rs 2,552 million from the Government of Pakistan.

While Phase II was in its initial stages, the Ministry of Education recognized the importance of the project in reaching the rural population through non-formal methods. It was therefore included as a model project in the National Education Policy of 1992 for future adoption.

STAFFING

Overall administrative control of the project lay with the Vice-Chancellor of the AIOU in his role as chairman. The Project Director, a permanent employee of the AIOU, was responsible for its implementation. A Programme Manager was appointed to co-ordinate, from the AIOU's central office, all the activities of the project team with, among others, the regional offices, non-governmental organizations, the ministries concerned and the funding agency. In addition, the Project Manager trained the project team at the central office, i.e. the Students Affairs Co-ordinators, the Tutors Affairs Co-ordinator, the Materials Co-ordinator and the Evaluation Co-ordinator. Field Co-ordinators, who were appointed in the regional offices, were also trained at workshops held at the central office. A designer was appointed to prepare the course text and publicity. Eight support staff and one financial officer were also appointed.

The activities at regional offices were co-ordinated through bi-annual meetings of Regional Directors and Field Co-ordinators at the AIOU's central office and in the Local Advisory Committees, with the occasional exchange of back-up visits by the central office staff in the field. There was also a Central Advisory Committee through which WSEP activities were shared with national NGOs, government departments, the funding agency and so forth.

For effective implementation, an annual plan of activities and individual activity plans for central office and field staff were prepared. Frequent meetings were held for the internal co-ordination of the project team. Close co-ordination was maintained within the AIOU's academic and services departments.

PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS

A multi-pronged strategy, including national and regional newspapers, radio broadcasts and national television, was used. Special supplements introducing the project and the project team were included in leading newspapers. Publicity posters, pamphlets, leaflets, news briefings, video scripts, radio interviews and publicity documentaries were also prepared and used.

The staff of the AIOU's central office and regional offices, together with the field staff of the project, made door-to-door visits in villages and towns of the target areas. During these visits, meetings were held with district management officers, local male and female councillors, religious leaders and other influential local people, District Education Officers, Assistant Education Officers, parents, volunteers, local health departments, and so forth. Visits to local middle and high schools proved very useful, since information was obtained on rates of school completion and drop-out. The drop-outs and middle certificate holders were then contacted individually and encouraged to join the programme. Local school teachers also played an important role in this campaign.

Delivery mechanism

Students are admitted twice a year, in the Autumn and Spring semesters. They are required to pay a course fee for each semester separately. Fees for rural students are lower than those for urban students.

The study materials, together with information about tutors and study centres, are sent to individual students at their homes. The study centre is a formal school near the student's home. Students are required to attend tutorials one day a week for one hour per course. Tutors for the courses are selected by the regional offices and appointed for a minimum group of ten students. In comparison, other AIOU programmes have a tutor/pupil ratio of 1:35.

Students are assessed continuously through written assignments, as well as through a three-hour written examination at the end of the course. Assignments are compulsory, with four required for full-credit courses and two for half-credit courses. A student is eligible to sit the final examination only if she completes the assignments satisfactorily. To obtain the final grade for the course, the marks of assignments and the final examination are calculated at a ratio of 30:70.

The programme's delivery mechanism has four components.

DEVELOPMENT OF COURSES AND LEARNING MATERIALS

The development of courses and learning materials has been one of the most important components of the WSEP. Twenty-two courses have been developed and offered, including both full- and half-credit courses (see Annex I). Seven courses are compulsory and the rest are elective. Students can take two to four courses per semester, depending on whether they are full- or half-credit. They can complete the curriculum in two years, taking six credits' worth of compulsory courses and two credits' worth of elective courses. A student can enrol for a maximum of two full-credit courses or four half-credit courses in a semester.

A full-credit course consists of twelve printed units and a half-credit course of six units, with one unit requiring approximately one week (or ten hours) of independent study, followed by a group tutorial. Each unit in the printed material includes an introduction to the subject under discussion, a statement of objectives, presentation of contents in sections, in-text questions for self-assessment activities, exercises, illustrations, a summary, a glossary and assignment questions. Students undertake any practical work required, as well as written assignments, before sitting for the final examination.

The WSEP has developed its own learning materials in collaboration with the academic departments of the AIOU. The course topics are selected keeping in mind the requirements of the national curriculum of the formal secondary system. Before work starts on any course, the Head of Department appoints a course co-ordinator and a course team. In accordance with the AIOU's requirements, a course committee, a technical committee and an academic council approve the course outline.

The schedule and target dates for each stage of course development are prepared by the Bureau for Academic Planning and Course Production in consultation with the academic department concerned. The WSEP provides training in the development of materials by holding workshops under the supervision of consultants and facilitates the course team's work in pre-testing for revised and newly developed units.

The print materials play a major role in the teaching/learning process within the programme. They are enriched and supplemented with audio-visual materials. Learning materials include the following:

- self-study print materials (course books);
- audio-cassette programmes;
- picture books to accompany the audio-cassettes;
- written assignments;
- study guide;
- radio programme schedule;
- television programme schedule;
- students' guide;
- instructional poster to illustrate programme procedures;
- newsletter.

In the pilot phase, the WSEP courses were developed without any pre-testing. However, when the project was implemented, both students and tutors provided feedback about the quality and contents of the courses. As yet, no systematic mechanism for course evaluation has been devised. On the basis of the feedback supplied by the evaluation and monitoring section, and through interaction with students and tutors during visits and at the AIOU's central office, the compulsory courses (General Science, English and Mathematics) and some elective courses have been revised and redeveloped.

Initially, even though the courses were developed for women, gender issues needed further consideration and consequently the contents of the courses required revision. Now that the project has been taken up by the AIOU as a regular programme in the Institute of Mass Education, new courses are planned and eventually some existing courses will be revised or replaced.

STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

At the beginning of the programme, it was recognized that an effective support system was needed to help students so that the problems facing them during their studies could be appropriately resolved. The need for a support system becomes even greater in distance education, when students live at a distance from their educational institution.

The WSEP's student support system has two major components, the first of which is the provision of guidance and counselling through print materials, correspondence, and telephone and personal contact. The print materials are sent to students with the study package each semester and include a students' guide, an instructional poster, and a newsletter that discusses student-related issues.

The students' guide was developed by the Student Affairs Co-ordinator in consultation with other WSEP staff. The main objective in developing this guide was to provide students with a maximum of information about the study process. It addresses issues such as:

- how to select courses;
- how to establish an effective study pattern;
- the objectives of audio and visual aids;
- why attendance at weekly tutorials is important;
- how to complete assignments and practical work;
- the best way to prepare for the final examination;
- the application procedure for the certificate.

The information is regularly updated, and an effort is made to ensure that the layout is attractive and the language is simple.

An instructional poster, printed for the first time in 1994, illustrates the entire procedure of the programme (from admission to obtaining the certificate) through pictures and simple text. By using the poster, students can follow the procedure step by step. They are asked to put the poster on the wall of their study room for easy reference.

The newsletter contains student writings (short stories, poetry, quotations, jokes, etc.) as well as contributions from the WSEP team. It introduces students to organizations that are working to improve the social, economic and legal status of women.

The second component of the support system is correspondence with students throughout the year. Written communications are supplemented with telephone contact, face-to-face meetings at the AIOU's central office and visits to the study centres of different regions.

In their letters, students most often raise questions about admission, examinations, delivery of study materials, appointment of tutors and certificates. The Students Affairs Co-ordinator not only answers these questions, but also provides academic, career and social counselling. For academic counselling, students are guided in course selection and are informed about various courses and other programmes offered by the AIOU. For career counselling, they are referred to various vocational and training programmes and to the First Women's Bank, which provides loans to women to start their own businesses. Many students are interested in training as primary school teachers, which at present does not guarantee a job. Information is therefore also provided about other professions open to female SSC holders, such as entrepreneurs, health workers, telephone operators and secretaries.

TUTOR SUPPORT SYSTEM

The role of the tutor is very important in the programme. Tutors are required to guide students in terms not only of their understanding of the course materials, but also of methods of study and the AIOU's administrative procedures. To perform these functions, the tutor must be trained specifically for the needs of the SSC student. Evaluation studies have shown that SSC students require tutoring and sometimes teaching aids.

Tutors are engaged on a part-time basis and are assigned to a group of students by the regional office at a minimum ratio of 1:10. Also, a study centre is allocated for conducting the tutorial sessions. Students meet their tutors in the study centres in order to receive guidance about the course materials.

WSEP tutors must be trained in distance education methods, as most of them have previously been teachers in the formal system. A five-day training workshop for tutors is arranged in a region served by the AIOU before each semester begins. Senior tutors are used as resource persons in these workshops, as well as subject specialists from local institutes, academics and course co-ordinators from the central office. The WSEP is in the process of developing a sustainable strategy for tutor training.

RESEARCH, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

Efforts to evolve a well-functioning and effective evaluation and monitoring system have been made since the beginning of the programme. The evaluation team developed the monitoring and evaluation system described below.

Feedback from field co-ordinators

First, checklists for the field co-ordinators to take with them into the field were experimented with. These proved to be ineffective, despite discussion with the field co-ordinators. On the basis of this experience, a system of quarterly feedback was introduced. The system includes several forms to be completed and a list of questions. The field co-ordinator takes the forms with her on a visit to the study centre and keeps them, duly completed, as a record. At the end of the quarter, the central office sends the questions to the field co-ordinators, who subsequently send in their reports containing information extracted from the forms. The programme staff react to the points raised by the field co-ordinators by contacting the relevant departments on the campus. The feedback is summarized and analyzed in a report. This system is now working, but it has some shortcomings; for example, the time involved in preparing the report is long (three months). Some problems require an immediate solution and a response from the central office. However, by the time a problem has been reported to the central office, it is often too late. The other problem is that this system does not guarantee regular reporting. For each quarter the central office has to send reminders to the field co-ordinators to send in their reports. A rethinking is therefore necessary in order to formulate an effective feedback system.

Feedback from tutors

In the initial stages of the project a tutor's record book was developed. This has been experimented with, but a satisfactory response has not yet been obtained. Currently, the main feedback from tutors is obtained during tutor-training workshops. The WSEP is trying to build up a database of individual tutors, and their qualifications and experience, in order to ensure that only capable and trained tutors are appointed.

Feedback from students

Students regularly contact the programme staff, especially the Student Affairs Co-ordinator. The latter solves the problems raised where possible, and answers students' questions. Every six months she produces a report on the analysis of the students' correspondence, which is an important source of information.

Research studies

The WSEP's research and evaluation team has conducted several studies on students. These studies have provided a picture of the students in the pro-

gramme, and the impact of the programme on their lives. Not only have they provided information on students, but they have also helped in designing a feedback system for tutors and field co-ordinators, as well as a student record and monitoring system.

These studies have focused on obtaining qualitative information through a combination of in-depth student interviews, group interviews and a survey. By contacting students and tutors in their own communities it has been possible to have a better appreciation and understanding of the different and often difficult situations in which they live. During visits and interviews, extra information is obtained relating to materials, tutors and tutorials, and examinations. The feedback on the course material becomes a rich source on which to base the revision and redevelopment of many courses.

Computerized student database

In order to monitor the progress of students, readily available online data are necessary. Data on student admissions and results are available which help the programme managers to monitor students' progress.

ADVANTAGES OF THE WSEP OVER THE FORMAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

In the WSEP, innovative methodology was planned and implemented from two perspectives:

- the learners' convenience;
- the optimum use of the available resources.

The delivery of services was planned keeping in mind the learners' context and the limited resources available. The positive side of non-formal education is that it provides flexibility and an opportunity for innovation which caters to the needs of learners and gives them another chance to acquire education.

The advantages of the distance education system and the limitations of the formal education system are set out in Table 1.

TABLE 1. The distance education system and the formal education system compared.

Advantages of the distance education system	Limitations of the formal school system
The minimum age for admission is 14.	Only students in the 13-15 age group can be admitted.
The learner proceeds at her own pace.	Learners are expected to proceed with the pace of the class.
A minimum period of two years for completion.	Maximum of two years to complete SSC Grades 9 and 10.
Semester system.	Annual system.
Two credit courses per semester, allowing the possibility of completing eight credits with a manageable study load.	Burden of eight courses throughout the study period.
Needs-based and skill-oriented courses, especially elective courses.	A non-needs-based fixed curriculum is taught.
Self-study material in a familiar language (Urdu, the national language) is used.	Traditional study materials are often not comprehensible even with frequent class coaching.
Weekly tutorials with part-time tutors. Sometimes, if there are only a small number of learners in an area, correspondence tutors are made available.	Although there is daily learner-teacher interaction, sometimes teachers are not available, and sometimes learners cannot manage to attend classes all week.
Core course book supported with audio cassettes, television programmes, practical kits, etc.	Additional materials are rarely prepared, supplied or used.
AIOU academic experts train part-time teachers.	Teachers continue without any refresher training courses.
More economical study packages (no school uniforms, etc.).	Study costs are high (uniform, materials, etc.).
Study centre in the nearest place.	Schools are mostly at a distance.
Study hours at the convenience of learners and teachers.	Fixed study schedule which interferes with learners' domestic commitments.
Study package delivered directly to learners.	The availability of study materials is restricted, especially in rural areas.
Maturity of learners means that they tend to be more motivated and committed.	Motivation, incentive and commitment are limited.
Maximum use made of education since it is needs-based.	Minimum use made of education since it is not needs-based.
Counselling has been found to be very useful for students in determining their future careers.	Counselling is almost non-existent.

Analysis of students' progress and performance

ASSIGNMENTS AND PRACTICALS

The only available analysis of student results dates from 1993-1994. This analysis covering three semesters shows that the average pass percentage in assignments improved from 56% in 1993 to 77% in 1994. The rate of submission of assignments also improved. In practicals, the average pass percentage was quite low in 1993 but increased considerably in 1994 from 48% to 61%. Almost all students passing assignments also pass the practical work.

TABLE 2. Pass percentages in assignments

Course title	Spring 1993	Autumn 1993	Spring 1994
Islamic studies	58	71	80
Pakistan studies	65	77	77
General science	62	58	77
Urdu	–	73	78
Family health and care	45	70	82
English I	58	55	72
Garment making I	48	56	63
Home economics	43	57	76
Garment making II	60	58	43
Sindhi	–	97	96
Arithmetic	60	52	65
English II	59	60	50
Average pass percentage	56	68	77

Source: Pakistan journal of distance education (Islamabad), vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1996, p. 82.

TABLE 3. Pass percentages in practicals

Course title	Spring 1993	Autumn 1993	Spring 1994
Garment making I	48	50	61
Home economics	30	55	80
Garment making II	59	44	40
Average pass percentage	48	49	61

Source: Pakistan journal of distance education (Islamabad), vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1996, p. 84.

APPEARANCE IN EXAMS

Students who pass the assignments (four per full credit course, two per half-credit) and practical work are eligible to appear in the final examinations. The percentage of students having passed assignments and practical work who went on to sit exams in these subjects for the first time rose steadily during the four semesters from 55% to 86%. However, for the two resit (reappear) chances in exams, the percentage attempting exams was considerably lower.

TABLE 4. Percentage of students appearing in examinations (of those who had already passed the assignments)

Examination	Spring 1993	Autumn 1993	Spring 1994	Autumn 1994
First attempt	55	78	82	86
Reappear	31	30	52	–*
Reappear again	22	23	–*	–*

* = The results of these examinations had not been announced at the time of the study.

Source: Pakistan journal of distance education (Islamabad), vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1996, p. 85.

PERFORMANCE IN EXAMS

Over the four semesters in question, the pass rate for those students making their first appearance in exams fluctuated between 65% and 76%. The pass rate was generally lower for resits by the students in this group (see Table 5). The overall average pass percentage over three semesters (Spring and Autumn 1993, Spring 1994) of students sitting exams for the first time was 68%. In Spring 1993, 38% of those enrolling that semester passed the exam while in Spring 1994, this figure rose considerably to 53%. In terms of absolute numbers, figures rose from 1,006 students passing courses in Spring 1993 to an estimated 3,700 in Spring 1994.

TABLE 5. Pass percentages in examinations (of those presenting themselves for examination)

Examination	Spring 1993	Autumn 1993	Spring 1994	Autumn 1994
First attempt	65	77	66	76
Reappear	55	57	57	–*
Reappear again	78	51	–*	–*

*= Data not available at the time of the study.

Source: Pakistan journal of distance education (Islamabad), vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1996, p. 87.

RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUAL COURSES

With the exception of a few courses, there was an increase in the pass percentage for assignments each semester (see Table 2). Figures for those passing practicals were lower but also showed an overall average increasing trend. The number of students who failed assignments was very low — less than 5%. However, there was a considerable number of drop-outs. The increasing trend in pass percentage for courses thus indicated a reduction in the number of drop-outs.

There were considerable differences among courses with regard to the average pass percentage in exams over the three semesters (see Table 6). Among the compulsory courses, pass rates in English I and Pakistan Studies were low (well below 50%). The poor performance in English constituted a major cause for dropping out. For the other compulsory courses pass rates were above the average with Sindhi and Urdu achieving very high pass rates.

TABLE 6. Percentage of passes in first-chance examinations (among those who presented themselves for examination)

Course	Compulsory/elective	Cumulative pass
Islamic studies	Compulsory	88
Pakistan studies	Compulsory	41
General science	Compulsory	72
Urdu	Compulsory	94
English I	Compulsory	33
English II	Compulsory	71
Sindhi	Compulsory	99
Arithmetic	Compulsory	72
Family health and care	Elective	94
Garment making I	Elective	56
Garment making II	Elective	82
General home economics	Elective	76
Average	–	68

Source: Pakistan journal of distance education (Islamabad), vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1996, p. 89.

PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS

Completing a study programme through distance education is in itself a considerable challenge for any student. As described earlier in this case study, very many of the WSEP students come from difficult socio-econcomic condi-

tions. A student profile study conducted in 1991 and a study of completers and non-completers of the Matriculation certificate conducted in 1996 (both by the AIOU) indicated a number of problems faced by students enrolling in the WSEP. While many students manage to surmount these difficulties, a large number have been unable to complete the curriculum and obtain their Matriculation certificate. Practical challenges include difficulty in paying fees, the heavy workload and responsibilities of students in their domestic lives, and long distances between students' homes and study and exam centres. Many students are unable to take full advantage of the distance learning methods since they do not have easy access to audio-visual equipment. Certain courses appear to pose particular difficulties to students. The reasons for this are likely to be complex, relating to both course content and mode of delivery.

A number of problems related to the administration of the programme have also created difficulties for students: instances of poor communication, leading to confusing information and late announcements about exam results and resits; cases of assignments not being marked or being lost which result in students being unable to sit exams.

Evaluation of the project

During the ten years of the project, the following evaluations have been carried out:

- an external evaluation by the donor agency in 1987;
- an external evaluation by the donor agency in 1988;
- an internal evaluation by the AIOU in 1992;
- an external evaluation by the donor agency in 1995.

The aim of the first two external evaluations was to evaluate the progress of the project and to advise on issues that needed further attention. The evaluation mission's analysis extended from the course material production process to the conduct of examinations, and also covered the AIOU's infrastructure and evaluation monitoring system. The mission noted:

> The achievements of the project over the past four years are very impressive and the project implementation has expanded rapidly. Looking at the growing number of participants, the project appears to meet a clearly existing societal demand (Hakemulder & Helleman-Toxopeus, 1989).

However, it pointed out areas where more attention needed to be paid:

> The experience of four years shows that a stronger infrastructure will be necessary at regional as well as at central level in order to provide for the extra services that are needed to enrol, motivate, guide and to administrate the growing number of participants. The contents and quality of the curriculum and its courses will need to be further developed and expanded in order to be able to offer a variety of quality programmes that meet the diverse education needs of the participants (Hakemulder & Helleman-Toxopeus, 1989).

The mission stated that a great deal of attention should be paid to the training of part-time tutors and that extra efforts were needed to prevent unnecessary drop-outs. It recommended that a strong and continuous evaluation and monitoring system be established. Looking at the future of the WSEP, the mission concluded that the latter did not exist in isolation from the other programmes of the AIOU, and that new initiatives would not only benefit from the experiences of the WSEP but also establish linkages in the programme which would provide a ladder scheme for female learners from literacy to Master's level.

The evaluation conducted by an internal team of the AIOU was undertaken as a result of the recommendations of the previous external evaluations. The intention was that lessons learned from both external and internal evaluations would help in strengthening and redesigning the implementation strategy for Phase II of the project (1992-95) and in formulating an implementation strategy for regularization of the project as part of the university's own programme.

The evaluation mission endorsed the conclusions of the previous evaluation, namely that the project definitely met the needs of the women and that the results coincided with the objectives of the project. The mission wrote:

> All the women started participating in the WSEP with enthusiasm and high expectation because the distance learning system of WSEP offers them an alternative to study at home, has no age limitations and only requires attendance at weekly tutorials rather than daily classes. They said that the system of distance learning itself suited them very well (Riffat, Chaudhry & Ayesha, 1992).

However, the mission recommended that the AIOU authorities should carefully plan the institutionalization of the project. In addition, the AIOU was urged to take the necessary measures to strengthen central and regional infrastructure.

On the basis of the recommendations of these evaluations, the plan of implementation for Phase II was drawn up and was implemented until 1995. Towards the end of Phase II, three consultants carried out a fourth evaluation. This evaluation was not intended simply to be a summing-up, but also to recommend changes to help make the programme more effective. It was noted that the evaluation of the WSEP was very encouraging in terms of admission and enrolment in the project. However, it was recommended that the middle certificate requirement for WSEP entry be reviewed and that more flexibility in entry criteria might result in more enrolment. With regard to support and tutoring, it was observed that:

> The teaching/learning strategies of WSEP are in the mainline of modern distance education methods. The main elements of course materials, regional and local infrastructure and the evaluation and monitoring system are in place. In particular, the role of face-to-face tutoring in distance learning is well understood and the lessons are in general well attended (Tait, 1995).

The evaluation team suggested many changes in the delivery system, which would help in further improvement of the programme. Commenting on the courses of the programme, Bela Jamil, a consultant, wrote, 'Some new material could be developed taking case studies from the students themselves to highlight the issue of change and development in relation to women in transition' (Jamil, 1996).

By the time the last evaluation of the project was conducted, the project had reached the age of maturity. On the basis of recommendations, future strategies for programme implementation and course production were formulated.

Impact

The programme has had a tremendous impact on the overall development of the girls and women who have completed their certificate or who joined but could not complete it.

There have been openings for teachers, health workers and nurses. Graduates have opportunities to undertake further education, e.g. the Primary Teacher-Training Certificate course, higher secondary education, vocational training, etc. Some have opened their own schools or vocational centres, provide tuition to younger children or are operating their own small businesses. They have gained confidence and increased their self-esteem, awareness and financial independence.

It has been noted that parents, husbands, brothers, in-laws, the local community, religious leaders and local district education departments have all recognized the quality of the WSEP. During the initial publicity campaigns, it was difficult to convince them of its utility and potential success. However, the in-built flexibility in the distance education system has considerably overcome the difficulties which the community, especially parents, were expecting.

The district education departments and NGOs are pleased with the improved situation of women's education since they are able to recruit more local teachers, as well as health and social workers.

Some of the major findings of those who have completed the programme, and those who have not, in the evaluation conducted by the project evaluation team study are as follows:

A major reason to enrol in WSEP is women's interest in education. Almost as important is the need to improve their income. More than half of the respondents of the study were already economically active, but needed to increase their income and many others wanted to start a job. Both groups felt that having the Secondary School Certificate would be a great help to achieve this goal. Indeed the study of completers shows that many women have managed to find and improve their job as a direct result of having the Secondary School Certificate.

The certificate has enabled many completers to get a job and improve their financial situation. A large group enrolled in (and some already completed) further education, mostly through AIOU. The completers use their increased knowledge in their daily life and feel that they are more confident and respected as now they have Secondary School Certificate.

Many non-completers also noted a positive change, in the sense that their knowledge and awareness have increased. But besides that, they expected the benefit would come once they also obtained the Secondary School Certificate (Batool & Bakkar, 1996).

The case studies on those who have completed the programme have shown that the SSC has helped them in a number of significant ways:

- It has brought financial benefits.
- They have gained confidence.
- They are much more aware of their role in society.
- Some of them have started independent businesses.
- Some are doing a Primary Teacher-Training Certificate course. (However, particularly in the AIOU, preference is given to applicants who have completed a university course).
- Some have proceeded to higher education in health, social work and technical subjects.
- Some students help their children with their school work.
- The courses have benefited them a great deal in dealing with day-to-day problems.

Not only has the WSEP brought financial benefits and more opportunities for education, but also its mode of delivery, i.e. distance learning, has proved to be a viable option. This system has enabled women to study in their own homes without going to school every day. The self-study package has helped them to learn with minimum assistance from others. Since the women who have enrolled in the WSEP have many domestic responsibilities, the system has provided them with an opportunity to study at their own pace and they can select optional subjects of interest to them. In addition, the AIOU has provided face-to-face tutorials for women, which has provided a good opportunity for socializing with other women and sharing their experiences.

The overall conclusion is that the WSEP has had a considerable impact on students' lives. The knowledge acquired has had a significant positive effect on students' confidence and the respect they receive from the community. The increased confidence and improved income-generating possibilities contribute to their empowerment.

Prospects

The WSEP is gaining momentum through its non-formal mode of education. The best thing that an experimental project can achieve is sustainability; and the programme has achieved this. The Allama Iqbal Open University reaches target groups from pre-literacy to Ph.D. level. The secondary level, which was once a missing link, has now assumed its place within the AIOU's system.

Some 3,000 students have completed the programme, another 2,000 are due to complete it and approximately 6,000 students are foreseen for upcoming enrolment. This is a group that will have a tremendous impact on the development of society as a whole. The outcomes in the form of availability of teachers at local levels, of health workers, of facilitators for social work, of skilled women, of mothers and sisters aware of the benefits of education, and of the addition of a financial contributor in the family are the most obvious benefits of the programme.

The maximum use of the formal system infrastructure was made in terms of buildings and staff. Extra benefits accruing to the formal institutions for facilitating distance education were that about 100 part-time tutors have been trained who are serving and can serve the local NGOs in the field of non-formal education. About 500 schools were established as study centres. They have been provided with extra financial support, as well as extra help with educational materials.

The programme has evolved a network of support systems for managing the programme in all major fields, i.e. student support, tutor training, material development and field support, by appointing female field staff and through the monitoring and evaluation system.

Staff who were appointed on a temporary basis have been regularized in the AIOU. The special appointment of female field staff in ten regional offices is a feature that has not only helped the programme but also facilitated the whole female audience of the other AIOU programmes. Regularization of field co-ordinators is still an uphill task, because it has to be approved by the government.

Materials development is an area where new clusters are to be developed and revision is a continuing process.

Recently, the programme has been opened up to a large audience, both male and female. To offer more choice for learners, new clusters are being planned. Technical courses, science courses, women's studies, preventive health, art and design, and interior decoration are a few of the areas where proposals have been developed by the faculties.

Another important issue relating to the programme was the need for it to achieve financial sustainability. The AIOU's authorities therefore decided to charge the students subsidized fees. This amount was higher than that charged during the project, i.e. Rs.60 to Rs.150 per semester. The students now pay Rs.200 to Rs.300 per semester. Initially, it was feared that there might be a sharp decrease in the interest of potential new entrants, which might have a negative effect on enrolment, but it has proved to be the other way round. The student enrolment is increasing each semester; clearly, the decision to increase fees did not affect the credibility of, and the need for, the programme. The earnings from fees have helped the AIOU with the financial sustainability of the programme's activities.

The incorporation of the programme within the Institute of Mass Education of the AIOU has provided a footing for it by filling the gap between primary and secondary education. However, the need for middle-level education has also been acknowledged. In the Institute of Mass Education there is a large number of opportunities to share experience and contribute in the field of learning materials development, teacher training, multi-media support, and evaluation and research. In this way, it is hoped to improve the provision of non-formal education on an on-going basis.

Annex: List of WSEP courses

Compulsory courses-6 credits

1. Urdu for everyday use	full credit
2. Functional English	full credit
3. Pakistan studies	full credit
4. Islamic studies	full credit
5. Maths for everyday use	full credit
6. General science	full credit
7. Sindhi compulsory	full credit

Elective/Optional courses—2 credits

Group A: Home economics

1. Garment making, part I	half credit
2. Garment making, part ii	half credit
3. Applied food and nutrition	full credit
4. The selling of home made products	full credit
5. General home economics	full credit

Group B: Agricultural education

6. Home and farm operation management	full credit
7. Poultry farming	half credit
8. The selling of home-made products	half credit

Group C: Health education

9. Family health care	full credit
10. First aid, part i	half credit
11. First aid, part ii	half credit
12. Applied food and nutrition	full credit

Group D: Vocational technical and commerce

13. Home electrical repair and maintenance	half credit
14. Electrical wiring	half credit

Group E: Teaching

15. Arabic	full credit
16. Education	full credit

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INNODATA MONOGRAPHS

This series of case studies of selected innovative projects and approaches in education continues the long tradition of the International Bureau of Education (IBE) of reporting in a variety of ways on change and innovation in educational practice. The series should be seen as complementary to INNODATA, the Bureau's databank of educational innovations available on the Internet. The monographs provide readers with more detailed information on selected innovations from the databank which have had considerable levels of success to date and are considered to be of great interest and relevance to education policy-makers and practitioners around the world. The case studies are written by individuals who have close experience with the innovations being described, in some instances having been directly involved in their creation and development.

Through the dissemination of quality information on exemplary initiatives in educational practice which may have applicability in diverse contexts, the IBE is continuing its quest to contribute to the improvement of primary and secondary education provision world-wide. The case studies have also been made available on the IBE's Web Site at:

http://www.ibe.unesco.org

The Web Site also provides regularly updated information on all other activities of the Bureau within its new programme focus on strengthening the capacity of countries to adapt the content of education to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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